



Netwatch

By Jim Carroll

Your guide to business & accounting on the Internet

Clue in, turn off, go without

For years I've watched Blackberry users with fascination. They're continually poking around on the tiny little wireless device, checking their e-mail, schedules and who knows what else. It's an addictive technology, often referred to irreverently as the Crackberry.

Over the years, I've proudly proclaimed I would never be sucked into the always-on, always-connected vortex. Then the kind folks at Research in Motion, makers of the Blackberry, sent me their new 6710 model, which doubles as an e-mail pager and cellphone. I quickly immersed myself in it and realized that, as a technology, it makes wonderful sense. I can now carry around a single

handheld device that lets me access my schedule and contact information, check e-mail and make phone calls.

I'll admit it, I'm hooked. And yet, one of the very first things I did was ensure my e-mail system wouldn't forward messages to my Blackberry between 5 p.m. Friday and 7 a.m. Monday. During the weekend, it will function only as a cellphone. On top

of that, my wife and children devised a strict set of rules for me so I wouldn't do anything dumb, like try to use it on the ski hill. To me, these are significant steps to ensuring a proper balance between personal and work time.

You should ask yourself if you've made the same kind of distinction. The fact is, our profession is known for its hard work ethic. We've already addressed this issue, with an increasing number of companies in public and private practice establishing policies that help ensure proper work-life balance (see "Firm options," p. 28). And yet, technology makes the work-life balancing act far more difficult. What with cellphones and pagers, PDAs and Blackberries, laptops and home offices, we're always plugged in, tuned in, ready to go at all hours of the day.

Such constant connectivity can ruin us, both professionally and personally. Studies show that increased connectivity leads to more responsibility, more pressure and hence, more stress, giving host to a bevy of health con-

cerns. In the long run, it costs employers big money. It's time companies adopt a culture ensuring they can benefit from connectivity while still giving people clear time away from work. There are several things staff and employers should do

to ensure work-life balance in the digital age:

Assess values. Is work more important than family and personal time? If so, it may be time to rethink priorities.

Create personal space. Make sure you create technology-free zones in your home, your office and in your life.

Learn the business case of balance. Take the time to understand why work-life balance is so important, and then examine your own circumstances.

Be frank. Make sure people understand you are going to have unplugged time and stick to it.

Assess the corporate culture. Encourage a candid discussion of your organization's work-life culture. If things are out of whack, fix the culture.

Examine new work models. These include telecommuting, part-time work, time shifting and other methods by which a company can meet its corporate objectives, yet not completely burn out its staff.

Learn to ignore. Turn things off. Go without. Successful people know when to tune out and unplug — take the time to do the same.

Jim Carroll, FCA, is a well-known speaker, author and columnist. Reach him at jcarroll@jimcarroll.com or log on to his website at www.jimcarroll.com

WORK-LIFE BALANCE SITES

Human Resources Development Canada
<http://labour.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/worklife/businesscase-en.cfm>

Fast Company magazine's Balanced Life online guide <http://www.fastcompany.com/online/resources/balance.html>

Canadian Policy Research Networks
www.jobquality.ca/indicator_e/dem004.stm

